

# COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING INITIATIVES

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to define and clarify the significance of community-based employment and training initiatives (CBETIs).

Initially, there is a need to define CBETIs and establish what they are and why they are significant. Placing CBETIs within the context of economic and labor market policies and developments in the Australian economy reveals that their role has been marginal and marginalised. The cause and consequence of this marginalisation is discussed. At the same time, there is a need to acknowledge and recognise the capacity and willingness of the community sector to impact on the mainstream and what conditions this impact with what causes and consequences - the actual and potential role of CBETIs.

The paper proceeds to identify the basis for incorporating community-based employment and training initiatives within employment and economic policy development.

## DEFINITION

Community based employment and training initiatives are based in regional or local communities which involve community ownership and control.

A community exists when individuals and groups share a common interest and a sense of identity. Communities could comprise specific population groups, specific issue groups and geographical specific groups.

Community-based employment and training initiatives should be owned and controlled by the smaller appropriate communities unless the larger and broader-based community can do it more democratically and effectively.

Critical to the notion of community is similarity and difference - recognising the actual differences and similarities within and between communities. Initiatives should be equally targetted at

differences and similarities and not attempt to force disparate communities into a consensus through compulsion.

A commitment to community-based employment and training initiatives raises the complex issue of autonomy - the (in)consistency between government policy and community-based initiatives.

Community-based employment and training initiatives should not be equated as initiatives within the social and community services sector. While the sector has considerable potential to generate community-based employment and training initiatives, the potential for developing these initiatives includes local government and conventional trading enterprises converting into cooperatives.

## CONTEXT

Having defined community-based employment and training initiatives, it is necessary to place these within the context of economic and employment development and, in particular, Commonwealth and Victorian Government policies and programs - as a basis for identifying the actual and potential role of the community in the development of employment and training initiatives.

In recent years, there have been significant shifts in both Commonwealth and Victorian Government policies and programs. While there are differences, they share the following common characteristics:

1. The importance of export growth.
2. An emphasis on productivity growth through technology change, increased capital intensity, industry restructuring and improved labor market efficiency.
3. The development of a sense of national commitment.
4. An emphasis on consultation and cooperation.
5. Increased employment in the private sector.
6. A decrease in overall living standards.
7. Particularly strong growth in part-time employment.

This has resulted in the development of labor market programs with the following characteristics:

1. A shift from job generation to training.
2. An emphasis on employment, education and training placement.
3. The integration of income support and labour market programs.

- 4.. An emphasis on individual problems - rather than structural barriers.
5. A privatisation of responsibility and functions.
6. Positive incentives to undertake education and training.

## Jobs To Training

In 1982 the Victorian State Budget allocated \$30 million to direct job creation in the public sector and the non-profit private sector. An estimated 3450 jobs were created - 92% for the long-term unemployed. EIP provided the model for the Australian Government's 1983 Community Employment Program and the Wage Pause Program of the previous Federal Government.

Up to 1985 the Victorian Government provided grants to improve access to employment for groups disadvantaged in the labour market to develop locally based employment initiatives and to investigate regional labour markets through three programs - Employment Development, Affirmative Employment and Cooperative Development Programs. Since 1985, however, the Victorian Government has shifted from local employment initiatives to employment, education and training placement. A significant exception, however, is the continued funding of the VCOSS Employment Unit. Over the last four years the Commonwealth Government has decreased expenditure on work experience and job creation programs by 40%.

## Placement

The Victorian Government has developed extensive job placement and retention services - Job Link, the Youth Guarantee Employment Counsellors Service, the Employment Access Program and the Open Employment Training Program. In 1988 both the Employment Access and Open Employment Programs are to be expanded.

## Integration

In the 1988-89 Commonwealth Budget introduced two new labor market programs to be jointly administered by DEET and DSS - New Start and Jobs, Education and Training (JET). In **Towards A Fairer Australia: Social Justice Budget Statement 1988-89** these programs are described as being based on a key objective of the Commonwealth Government:

*linking social security payments  
with labour market provisions to  
actively assist the disadvantaged and  
improve their standard of living by  
helping them to move into jobs.(p 10)*

## Individual Problems

In **The Next Step** the Victorian Government said that it would introduce affirmative programs in State Government departments, local government and the private sector to overcome the barriers to work for the particularly disadvantaged with the aim of providing permanent employment and changing discriminatory employment practices (p 25)

## Privatisation

Government policies are predicated on a private sector-led recovery - stimulated by selective public sector initiatives.

This is reflected in the shift from job creation to training in public sector resource allocation and the envisaged role of the private sector in training. In **A Changing Workforce** the Commonwealth Government outlines its plans for industry to become more involved in the education and training system.

The Commonwealth Government is expanding its private sector-based NEIS. An estimated \$7.3 million is to be provided in 1988/89 for 600 participants. Non-government and private sector organisations will be encouraged to provide loans and grants. The Australian Traineeship system was originally developed in the public sector but it is in the private sector where most traineeships will be developed. In Victoria it is reflected by the shift from a public sector SAAS to a public-private sector TAAP.

## Incentives

In **A New Start for the Long-Term Unemployed: Background Paper**, the Commonwealth Government has emphasised reciprocal obligation:

*It is reasonable to expect jobseekers who are being targeted with additional Government assistance under the New-Start strategy to actively pursue all suitable avenues to improve their job prospects and find work. Accordingly, attendance at intensive DSS/CES interviews and follow-up sessions will be obligatory, unless a reason is provided; any suitable labour market assistance offered should be accepted, unless there is good reason for not doing so, or an acceptable alternative course of action, is suggested by the jobseeker. (p 7)*

These shifts are not based on an explicit employment policy. In **The Next Step**, however, the Victorian Government did argue:

*More generally, and as an adjunct to macro-economic policy and Economic Strategy, there is a continuing need for employment policy at a State level, Employment policy encompasses those policies and initiatives which are directed at increasing employment opportunities, improving the access to employment of those traditionally disadvantaged in the labour market and improving the quality of working life. As such, employment policy is recognised as a central concern of the Government. "*  
(p 24)

## MARGINALISED

Community-based organisations have an accepted but limited role in the development of employment and training initiatives. The limitation is determined by what the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments respectively are willing to support - rather than a self-imposed limitation imposed by community-based organisations.

The survival of CBETI initiatives depends on the popularity, dexterity and flexibility of organisations in adjusting to different governments, policies and programs.

While there is an accepted role, it is marginalised. The capacity of community-based organisations to impact on the development of employment and training initiatives has been limited. In **Skills For Australia** the Commonwealth discussed community-based assistance to unemployed people without specifying a philosophical basis for this involvement. (pp 88-93). This is in contrast to an earlier argument in the document that the private-sector and

workers have a responsibility to meet their share of financial responsibility for training (pp 13-14).

The explanation for this marginalisation is an inter-related series of factors:

1. The failure of community-based agencies to articulate their own ideology and methodology.
2. The reactive, submissive and ad hoc response of community-based agencies to employment and training initiatives.
3. The acceptance of community-based agencies of the lead roles of the State and/or the private sector in the development of employment and training initiatives.
4. The dominant and dominating role of the government, trade unions and employers in the development of employment and training initiatives.
5. The internal and external perception of community-based agencies being peripheral to economic and employment development.
6. The resource constraints imposed on community-based agencies.
7. Actual community-based employment and training initiatives focussing on local practicalities - rather than system change.

## COMMUNITY CASE

In **Skills For Australia**, the Commonwealth Government has identified the following objectives:

*increase the total level of participation in education and training, and expand the national training capacity*

*improve the quality and flexibility of our education and training systems, and hence the quality, breadth and adaptability of skills acquired*

*improve the distribution and balance of the national education and training effort, to better meet the long-term needs of the economy and labour market*

*raise the level of private sector investment in training and skills formation*

*improve the employment and training opportunities available to the unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged members of the community - including measures to reduce the high degree of occupational segregation in the labour market and to improve training opportunities for women*

*increase the productivity of our education and training resources, and evaluate the output achieved from the use of those resources (pp iii-iv)*

The argument for community-based employment and training initiatives rests on their capacity to meet these objectives in a way that cannot be fully met by the public and private sectors. Victoria's Social Justice Strategy, however, does provide the basis for reducing this marginalisation. In **People and Opportunities** the Victorian Government's social justice objectives are identified as:

*.Reducing disadvantage caused by unequal Access to economic resources and power.*

*.Increasing access to essential goods and services according to need.*

*. Expanding opportunities for genuine participation by all Victorians in decisions which affect their lives.*

*. Protecting, extending and ensuring the effective exercise of EQUAL legal, industrial and political rights. (p 13)*

In its 1984 formulation of its economic strategy, the Victorian Government emphasised that it:

*"... seeks to facilitate equitable access to this prosperity, and to the quality of life which it makes possible for all sections of the community so that each member of the Victorian community can achieve both economic security and personal fulfilment" (p 1)*

In 1977 **The Review of the Commonwealth Employment Service** suggested the establishment of a national and State manpower advisory committees. These committees were to include community groups - representing the users of C.E.S. services (p 213). In 1988 in **Refocusing Services to Clients** the Task Force on Training and Education has noted that:

*Community groups, whether self-funded or reliant on other sources of funding, are becoming more active in providing support services for the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. (p 34)*

The arguments for community-based employment and training initiatives could be summarised as follows:

1. **Providing a safety net for existing government policies**

and programs.

2. Complementing existing government policies and programs.

3. Transferring responsibilities for employment and training initiatives from the public to the private and community sectors.

4. Support the capacity of communities to develop community-based employment and training initiatives.

5. Providing an alternative basis and forms for the development of employment and training initiatives.

6. Supporting communities in economic and labor market transition.

7. Supporting political and economic democratisation.

## Safety-Net

The idea of a safety-net is that government policies and programs are not infallible - despite the comprehensiveness of the policy base. There is a need, therefore, to allow for options outside existing policy.

## Complementing

This is an argument developed by the NAGLEI Report - on the basis that within existing policies and programs there are discernible gaps which local employment initiatives filled.

## Transfer

This is an argument to transfer responsibility for developing responsibilities and functions for employment and training initiatives from the public sector to the community and private sectors.

## Supporting

The basis of this argument is that the willingness and capability of the community to undertake employment and training initiatives is more important than the actual initiatives. This willingness and capacity should be supported - rather than the particular initiatives.

## Alternative

The basis of this argument is that employment and training



initiatives are based on a centralist paradigm and there is a need to encourage and develop alternatives which challenge centralising characteristics.

The alternative is based on a communal provision of employment and training services - rather than a privatised and nationalised provision.

Economic democracy is the democratisation of the ownership and control of business enterprises. Some of the most sophisticated forms of democratised industries are the cooperative enterprises in Italy and Mondragon, Spain, and self-management in Yugoslavia.

While the arguments for community-based employment and training initiatives are dissimilar, they share a common commitment to community ownership and control of employment and training initiatives. Where they differ is in the purpose of these initiatives and the forms of ownership and control.

## Transition

The basis of this argument is that many communities are in economic and labor market transition. This argument was also taken up by the National Advisory Group on Local Employment Initiatives.

## Democracy

This argument is predicated on the belief that the economic, social and political transformation of Australia must be based on a strategic program of democratisation. Critical to this democratisation is a culture of democracy - the capacity and willingness of individuals and organisations to generate and maintain democratic economic, social and political structures and decision-making processes.

## INGREDIENTS

The role of community-based agencies in employment and training initiatives is dependent on the agencies themselves.

The agencies themselves have to articulate this role. A major significance of the NAGLEI report was its attempt to articulate a distinct role for community agencies in the development of local employment initiatives. A factor in the rejection of local employment initiatives as a program was the perception about appropriate and inappropriate roles for community-based agencies

in the development of employment and training initiatives - particularly in the development of alternative forms of business enterprise.

What, then, are the necessary ingredients for incorporating CBETs within labour market policies and programs?

**A common philosophy.**

**A clear aim, and objectives.**

**A proposal in context.**

**An organisation.**

**Strategies.**

## Common Philosophy

The basis for establishing a clear aim and objectives and a coordinated organisation is a common philosophy about community-based employment and training initiatives. While there will be differences, there is a need to establish what is agreed in common. This common philosophy will underpin the aim, objectives and organisation.

If practical, it is important that the commonalities are fundamental and the differences are not too substantial to provoke subsequent conflict. Differences may be submerged for a common aim in the short-term whereas in the long-term the differences may be more important than short-term commonalities.

A critical issue about community-based employment and training initiatives is the extent that they involve an explicit and/or implicit shift of responsibilities for (un)employment from the public to the community sector. Community-based employment and training initiatives cannot be realistically proposed and developed in isolation. They raise important issues about the role of the public sector and have the ambivalent potential to reinforce and/or undermine the public sector by undertaking the provision of goods and services which have been traditionally provided by the public sector. They could be supported because they provide a cheaper service than is provided through the public sector - through voluntary work, in kind contributions and lower wages and working conditions.

## Clear Aim and Objectives

Presumably, the aim would be to establish community-based employment and training initiatives as a government policy objective and priority.

Consistent with this aim would be the following objective-that the Victorian and Commonwealth governments recognise and increase community sector involvement in the development of employment and training initiatives.

## Organisation

Organisation is critical - a capacity and willingness to organise for a defined aim and objectives.

Conventional community development theory is based on consensus - local government, the business sector and the community sector working together in planning and achieving the community's desired future. This partnership is seen as a pre-condition to the community development process - combined power maximises the capacity of communities to construct and control their futures.

Communities do have options and a consensus choice about an option does maximise the possibility of achieving this choice. But, then, of course, the options may involve significant fundamental differences of interest and ideology. Community development is an issue of methodology and ideology. While there may be consensus about methodology, ideology involves fundamental choices of philosophy and values.

Organisation, however, must be informed by and based upon cooperation between communities - working together with a common philosophy, clear aim, objectives and strategies. Community-based employment and training initiatives should attempt to cooperate within localities - an economic cooperation that complements political cooperation.

## Proposal

The challenge is to establish a credible proposal and a sustained argument for community-based employment and training initiatives and simultaneously place this argument within the liberal/social democratic framework on which policy debates and political decisions are premised and conducted.

There will be a tendency to interpret government policy and develop a proposal that is perceived to be consistent. But, then, governments and/or policies change. Any proposal needs to be independent of any specific Government or policy but be capable of initial and ongoing adaptation.

## Strategies

A critical determinant of impact will be the organisational base of the organisation - which interests are included and excluded.

A starting point for community-based employment and training initiatives is the social and community services sector. It is imperative, however, that this base be expanded to include local government, churches, ethical investors, social purpose enterprises and unions.

## CONCLUSION

An argument for CBETIs does not exist in isolation. Critical to any argument are internal and external conditions which influence their feasibility. Chance and timing are as important as anything else.

What cannot be predetermined is when the argument for CBETIs will succeed and, indeed, what will actually be achieved for what benefits and costs. Ultimately, it depends not on proving that community-based employment and training initiatives can succeed but rather on the political commitment of communities to develop their own employment and training initiatives.

Hopefully, this paper has provided a basis for examining the development of community-based employment and training initiatives. The issues are complex and confusing - involving choices and decisions.

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